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ABSTRACT

Contemporary authors' definitions of supervision suggest that in the American public school supervision evolved from four major conceptual foundations: (1) human concern, (2) leadership, (3) instructional improvement, and (4) administration. The categorization of definitions and explanations from 21 leading supervision authorities of the past 50 years is presented in a table. An analysis of these definitions reveals that, of the 21 authors, 19 perceive instructional improvement to be the cornerstone of supervision; 17 also express the necessity of leadership in supervision; and 13 state the relationship between supervision and administration. However, only 12 of the 21 authors stressed the human concern "foundation" of supervision. This lack of emphasis on human concern can be directly related to the scientific and rational approach to supervision. Philosophically, however, most of the authors cited would agree that supervision must be concerned with the human element in both students and teachers. (MLF)

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CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION:

A RATIONALE FOR THE HUMAN CONCERN

Presented at AERA

36:04 Supervision of Teachers:

Focus on the Teacher

April 2, 1985

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When the term 'supervision' is used in education, what does it imply? Does it refer to a person or a process? And what are the types of activities in which supervisors engage? Ambiguity and confusion too often plague supervision definitions because of the wide variety of assigned and assumed responsibilities, the wide range of persons performing them, and the authority dilemma. Teachers may at times supervise their peers, supervisors work directly with teachers in the school and principals are responsible for instructional leadership in the school, part of which involves supervising teachers. Further,

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supervisor roles vary according to locality and state. And definitions vary as well, including evaluating curricula, designing new courses of study, effecting the school environment, evaluating instruction, working with teachers to seek new and better ways of effecting instructional improvement, etc.

Evolution of Supervision

In the process of researching contemporary authors' definitions, I found supervision to be built upon an interdisciplinary foundation, strongly influenced by the changes in the role of American education. Early supervision was carried out by religious and lay "volunteers" with limited inspection responsibilities. As education moved from a male oriented privilege with religious overtones, to a right of all citizens and a need of self-government, supervision's role changed from inspecting and overseeing to efficiency training and then to assisting and improving. And as the scope and time constraints of emerging supervisory responsibilities became too demanding for "volunteer" personnel, a superintendent was employed. When school systems became larger and the superintendent's role became more involved, supervisory responsibilities were delegated to assistant superintendents, other central office personnel and principals. In most cases today, supervision is carried out by supervisors and principals. Principals are both recognized as and expected to be instructional leaders fulfilling supervisory responsibilities.

In their attempt to define "supervision", educators develop assumptions and principles as guides. Harris (1985) for example, includes thirteen propositions, ten tasks, six processes, and thirty-two competencies in this text; Eye and Netzer (1971) present nineteen

assumptions; Brueckner (1955) incorporates principles for governing both the purposes and operation of supervision. A specific example might help. Lovell and Wiles (1983) present a conceptual framework composed of

--Assumptions about: professional workers (six), educational organizations (eight), instructional supervisory behavior (nine)--with four process assumptions and seven functions.

--Concepts: mental health, counseling (six), learning (five), group development (thirteen), leadership (twelve), human relations (four), communication (fifteen), community power structure (three).

--Inferred Hypotheses: consisting of five major and thirteen minor headings

which they consider the basis for their theory and from which they build the ideas included in their text.

Definitions

The Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction (1931) defines supervision as

> . . . all activities by which educational officers may express leadership in the improvement of learning and teaching. Such activities as observation of classroom instruction, conduct of teachers' meetings and of group and individual conferences are clearly within the meaning of this term. The development and execution of plans looking toward increased effectiveness in reading, arithmetic, and some other area of the school program, and the organization or reorganization of curriculum and method are still further examples of what is meant by supervisory activities.

(p. 3)

According to The Dictionary of Education (1945) supervision incorporates

> All efforts of designated school officials directed toward providing leadership to teachers and other educational workers in the improvement of instruction; involves the stimulation of professional growth and development of teachers, the selection and revision of education objectives, materials of instruction, and methods of teaching, and the evaluation of instruction. (p.539)

Burton and Brueckner (1955) state that supervision is an expert technical service primarily aimed at studying and improving co-operatively all factors which affect child growth and development. They support their position by noting that everything in a school system is designed to stimulate learning and growth. Supervision affords expert and specialized leadership to such growth factors as self-direction, self-guidance and self-supervision in promoting creative and dynamic teachers. Carlson (1965) and Whittier (1969) also emphasize the task of leading the teacher to improve teaching skills. Unruh and Turner (1970) state that educational leadership is the most significant of all supervisory components and emphasized its significance in providing opportunities for teacher growth. Rather than defining supervision they choose to describe it in terms of:

a) a social, psychological, and education process which forms a foundation for good human relations,

b) a function designed to help teachers do a better job, improve curriculum, and help teachers with role definition, and

c) educational leadership, the tasks and skills of which provide

for teacher development and positive growth.

Other authorities as Eye, Netzer and Krey (1971), Wilhelms (1973), Alfonso, Firth, and Neville (1975) also consider supervision an administrative function enhanced by leadership. Wiles and Bondi (1980) suggest that supervisors divest themselves of the administration, teaching, curriculum cloaks, and instead define supervision as a unique supervision role.

Dull (1981) says supervision refers to the actions of professional educators that are exercised to improve all facets of instruction through democratic leadership.

Sergiovanni (1982), in the ASCD Yearbook introduction, refers to supervision as "a field broadly conceived, a general school activity that encompasses a number of school roles and that includes virtually all of the activities of administrators and supervisors involved in the improvement of instruction" (p. 6). Sergiovanni's earlier (1966, 1971, 1979) descriptions of supervision all point to instructional improvement through leadership and human resources. He also expresses concern that supervision is too often considered a process rather than a concept or theory.

Lovell and Wiles (1983) perceive supervision as helping to improve learning opportunities for students, and supervisors as leaders who establish communication, stimulate staff members, and support the instructional improvement process. Throughout their discussion supervision is referred to as an instructional behavior system in a conceptual framework.

Doll (1983) believes the fundamental purposes of supervision to be increasing confidence and improving competence of teachers.

Oliva (1984) conceives of supervision as a (service) means of offering special help in improving instruction and curriculum. Every administrator, ipso facto, is a supervisor. Dull, Doll and Oliva stress staff development in their definitions.

Lowery (1985) defines supervision as managers overseeing people doing work.

Marks, Stoops and Stoops (1985) define supervision as action and experimentation aimed at improving instruction and the instructional program and thus it should be the concern of all in the school (system).

Harris (1975, 1985) continues to define supervision as what school personnel do with adults and things to maintain or change the school operation in ways that directly influence the teaching processes employed to promote pupil learning. He emphasizes it to be highly instruction related but not highly pupil related.

The above definitions suggest that supervision in the American public schools evolved from four major conceptual foundations:

-- human concern

-- leadership

-- instructional improvement

-- administration.

The categorization (with respect to these conceptual foundations) of definitions and explanations from leading supervision authorities of the past fifty years is presented in Table 1. An analysis of these definitions, as reflected in Table 1, reveals that 19 of 21 authors perceive instructional improvement to be the cornerstone of supervision. This is not surprising, as most teachers and supervisors generally regard improvement as supervision's main goal. A majority of authors also

express the necessity of leadership in supervision (17 of 21) and the relationship between supervision and administration (13 of 21). Only 12, however, of the 21 authors stressed the human concern "foundation" of supervision. This lack of emphasis on human concern can be directly related to the advocation of an objective, scientific, and rational approach to supervision.

Rationale for Humanistic Concern

In "Beyond the Skills: The Person Within the Teacher", Fred Wilhelms (1973) establishes a marvelous basis for including human concern as a foundation for supervision. His rationale begins with this premise:

> More and more, we perceive that the only teacher who can really do the job is one who somehow feels good about himself, the people he works with, and the world he works in. He has to see himself as a basically adequate person and a real professional, no matter how hard he still works to improve. As a person he has to feel himself wanted; and as a professional he has to feel himself respected ... Above all, he has to be comfortable enough, inside himself, to be authentically what he is and to send out communications congruent with his real self. (p. 36-37)

Many of Wilhelm's supervisor and supervisor educator colleagues, including Anderson, Goldhammer, Krajewski, Lovell, Sergiovanni, Turner, Unruh and Wiles agree with his assessment that the first obligation of a school is to be "healthful" for all who have to be there -- teachers as well as learners, and that a teacher is more likely to grow in his work if he feels cared for and professionally respected.

In this explanation by Goldhammer, Anderson and Krajewski (1980):

> Often linked with educational administration and invariably connected with the concept of educational leadership, supervision is today seen as that dimension of the teaching profession which is concerned with improving instructional effectiveness. Nearly all definitions state or imply that supervision is the task assigned to certain school employees, whether in a line or staff relationship to classroom teachers (or counselors), to stimulate staff growth and development, to influence teacher behaviors in the classroom (or counseling center), and to foster the selection, development, use, and evaluation of good instructional approaches and materials. Some definitions place particular stress upon the role of communication skills in supervision, and in recent years there has emerged a strong emphasis upon helping teachers with problem-solving, with interpersonal relationships within the school, and with the creation of a more humane atmosphere to surround children and the adults who teach them. Nearly all discussions of supervision, in textbooks and periodicals over a half century, have wrestled with the difficult problem of separating helping behaviors from evaluating behaviors on the part of supervisors, since the helping functions have most often been assigned to the same persons (principals, department heads, directors) who are at times responsible for employment, promotions, and/or salary decisions. (p. 13)

together with their view that nearly everything leaders do in the course of working with teachers is in some way a part of supervision the authors reinforce the idea that the human concern is a necessary foundation for supervision. Indeed I will go one step further and suggest

that the human concern foundation must preclude all else. Viewing supervision only from an objective, scientific framework has negative implications. Philosophically, I suggest most of the authors cited herein would agree. Because supervision helps bring about better teaching and learning situations, it must be concerned with the human element--both student and teacher.

Table 1

Conceptual Foundations of Supervision

1931 - Present

Author	Date	CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS			
		Human Concern	Leadership	Instructional Improvement	Administrati
DS DI	1931		X	X	
Dictionary of Education	1945		X	X	
Burton & Brueckner	1955	X		X	
Franseth	1961	X	X	X	
Carlson	1965			X	X
Whittier	1969		X		X
Unruh & Turner	1970	X	X	X	
Eye, Netzer & Krey	1971			X	X
Mosher & Purpel	1972		X	X	
Wilhelms	1973	X	X	X	X
Alfonso, Firth & Neville	1975		X	X	X
Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski	1980	X	X	X	X
Wiles & Bondi	1980		X		X
Dull	1981	X	X	X	X
Sergiovanni	1982	X	X	X	X
Lovell & Wiles	1983	X	X	X	
Doll	1983	X	X	X	
Oliva	1984	X	X	X	
Lowery	1985		X		X
Marks, Stoops & Stoops	1985			X	X
Harris	1985		X	X	X